

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Rural Electrification Administration  
Washington 25, D. C.

January 14, 1949

To : All REA Borrowers

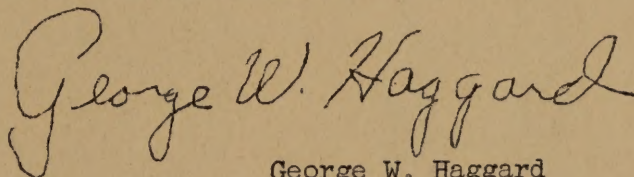
From : George W. Haggard, Assistant Administrator

Subject: Member and Community Relations Summary

One of the most impressive demonstrations of the interest being shown by co-ops in member and community relations was given at a conference of newly-chosen rural electric co-op leaders in Washington last December.

At that conference, approximately 60 managers and directors of cooperatives from various States devoted part of two days' sessions to a thorough discussion of the problems involved in informing members and the public about the aims and objectives of rural electric cooperatives and about the many uses for electricity in rural areas. The conference broke up into five groups for discussion purposes, and leaders chosen by these groups reported back to the entire conference the following day.

The results of those group discussions are contained, in condensed form, in the booklet enclosed. We feel that the opinions and experiences expressed therein were extremely stimulating. We hope they will be of value to other cooperatives now conducting or planning educational programs.



George W. Haggard

Enclosure

USDA  
LIB







696176

# CO-OP LEADERS SPEAK . . .



A REPORT OF DISCUSSION ON CO-OP EDUCATION WORK AT CO-OP MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE • DEC. 6-11, 1948, WASHINGTON, D.C.



One of the most vital parts of the REA co-  
op management conference at REA headquarters,  
Washington, D. C., December 6-11, 1948, con-  
cerned member education and community relations.

To facilitate discussion of these problems,  
the new managers and board members attending the  
conference broke up into five groups. Each group  
discussed one broad phase of member or community  
relations, with the results shown on these pages.

These discussions, while limited by time,  
indicate that new leaders, too, recognize the  
need for better member understanding of coopera-  
tive principles and functions. They underline  
the importance of dealing with member and com-  
munity relations in concrete, understandable  
terms -- and doing so immediately.

## GROUP I

"HOW TO BUILD COMMUNITY GOODWILL"

"HOW TO KEEP MEMBERS INFORMED"

"HOW TO PLAN FOR POWER USE PROGRAM"

"HOW TO OFFSET  
OPPOSITION PROPAGANDA"



## "HOW TO DEVELOP MEMBER RESPONSIBILITY"

Delegate reporting: J. Dean Jorgensen,  
Manager, Nishnabotna Valley Electric  
Cooperative, Harlan, Iowa

### *Give Them Real Jobs*

When members have something to do they develop a sense of responsibility to the co-op. Find jobs -- annual and neighborhood meeting assignments, for example -- to get them interested in their co-op's welfare. Encourage them to phone the co-op office or some other responsible person when there is an outage or when brush or trees need to be trimmed near lines or poles on their property. Stress the importance of granting rights-of-way to enable new lines to go through. Make the members feel important to the co-op.

### *At Annual Meetings*

Planning for an annual meeting should begin *immediately* after the previous meeting. Members can be drawn into committee work at least 3 months ahead of the meeting, to give them a feeling of helping from start to finish. Daily reminders about the meeting on a radio farm program, as time draws near for the meeting, might be arranged, with new features stressed by committee members.

Next to adequate planning, adequate facilities for a meeting are most important to make the members feel they are taking part in the program. Adequate size of the meeting hall, adequate ventilation, lighting and sanitation are vital. Set up public address facilities on the floor as well as on the platform, so members who speak can be heard by all. Plan an attention-getting program, with lunch or prizes as special drawing cards. Make reports short, clear, and informative. Keep the meeting moving rapidly in a business-like way. Include young people on the program; this will help their parents to feel greater responsibility for the success of the meeting -- and incidentally, of the co-op.

### *Build Up Feeling Of Pride*

Publicity not only brings out members to meetings. It helps cultivate a feeling of personal pride in activities of "my co-op." Use every method--letters to members, newsletter, local press, and local radio. Hit hard at the member-ownership theme in everything you write.

### *Deal With Members Individually*

Take advantage of personal contacts--in the office, at home, on the farm--to point out im-



portance of members' participating in co-op affairs. Frequent exchange of viewpoints of manager and board members makes for closer understanding.

#### *Full In Young People*

Develop activities for young people. The technique employed by Soil Conservation Districts of awarding prizes to young people for special projects was cited as an example of drawing youth into the program. When the young people participate, their parents will be in-

### GROUP 2

### "HOW TO BUILD COMMUNITY GOODWILL"

terested.

#### *Get Everybody to Join*

A solution for those co-ops faced with the problem of transients, such as construction workers living in trailer camps, is to obtain memberships from all served. Show the transient members the stake they have in co-ops if they eventually stay in the community. Conduct your information campaign with these people through the newsletter and other printed matter, group meetings, personal contacts by co-op employees.

Delegate reporting: J. M. Maddox, Manager,  
Southwest Rural Electric Association,  
Tipton, Oklahoma

#### *Give Them Facts*

Keep the community informed about activities of the co-op, and about the benefits the community derives from your business. Here are some specific suggestions.

#### *Use Press and Radio*

Publicize community improvements made possible by co-op electricity. Localize news

stories -- specific areas and specific people, if possible. Issue releases regularly so that the editor will count on your copy. Write feature stories on members' unusual uses of electric power in their farming operations. It may be wise to purchase space in local papers occasionally, such as in special editions.

Use the radio to warn the community about planned outages and for special co-op news involving the entire community.



### *Tell Your Story to Groups*

By working with community organizations you can tell the story of co-op electrification to many people who otherwise might never understand it.

*Youth groups*, like 4-H Clubs and FFA Clubs, can be reached through electrification project contests, with prizes by your co-op, the State-wide, or both. It is important, in this connection, to get electrification information to instructors for them to pass on to the boys. They might be interested in helping with a booth at fairs.

*Home Demonstration Clubs* are good outlets for your story -- and for specific information on lighting, cooking with electricity, and how to repair lamp cords and do other minor jobs. Show how electrical use aids better home making in all respects.

*Teachers* need to be told of the importance of co-op electricity to the community. Pupils need to be taught how to read meters, importance

of adequate lighting, and need for adequate wiring -- also how public health and other community benefits are aided.

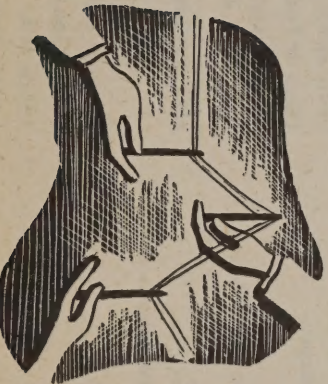
Show *rural pastors* the social and community benefits of co-op electrification, and point out ways in which your co-op can help them modernize their churches.

Join *local service and commercial clubs*, and take advantage of opportunities to tell the group of benefits co-op electricity has brought to the community.

Enlist the aid of *wiremen*. Explain and discuss the requirements of the National Electrical Code and REA.

### *Keep Hammering*

Repetition counts. Explanation of the workings of electric co-ops should be made to members, other individuals and groups at every opportunity.





## GROUP 3

### "HOW TO KEEP MEMBERS INFORMED"

Delegate reporting: Jim Ridenour, President, Flathead Electric Cooperative, Kalispell, Montana

#### *Members Need the Facts*

Members have a right to know what the co-op does, its construction and business operations. They need to know their own rights and responsibilities as members. Informed members support the co-op, are anxious to cooperate in keeping costs down, and want to know how to use their electric power to the best advantage. Here are suggested ways and means for doing this.

#### *Newsletter Is Direct*

One of the best devices for keeping members informed is a good, live newsletter, featuring local, personal news. Use it to report the why and where of outages, important new installations by co-op or members, important board action, important meetings where the co-op is represented, negotiations on new power contracts, co-op meetings for benefit of non-attendants, and explanations of important difficulties. Some scattered jokes help build reader interest. Important: Send newsletters to all prospective as well as present members.

#### *Use All Devices*

Use every method -- personal discussion, explanations by the manager, board, or other

qualified persons, informative printed matter, including Statewide co-op newspapers; annual and group meetings -- to explain the functions of your co-op. "A Guide for Members of Rural Electric Co-ops" should go to every member and prospective member.

#### *United Front Essential*

Clearly define duties and responsibilities of manager, board, and membership. Discuss possible actions freely in the board before decisions are made, then unite behind the majority decision. Board should back up the manager in contacts with members.

#### *Use Co-op Staff*

Since the office staff and co-op linemen have most frequent contact with members, keep them informed of current and future activities of the co-op so they can make effective personal contacts with members.

#### *Use Bylaws*

Send a copy of the bylaws to each member. Review them from time to time, especially in situations where a member's application may be involved. Keep members informed of new amendments and reasons for them.



## GROUP 4

## "HOW TO PLAN FOR POWER USE PROGRAM"

Delegate reporting: French H. Smith, Manager, Davidson Electric Membership Corporation, Lexington, N.C.

### *Need for Efficient Power Use*

In the face of the increasing power shortage, rising wholesale power rates, and the increasing availability of electrical appliances and equipment, co-op members want to know how to make the most efficient use of the power they buy. They need to know, too, how to make the most efficient use of the equipment they buy. Here are some suggestions on planning an educational program for your members.

### *Who's to Do the Job?*

Even though every co-op employee should know and tell the essential facts about power use, train one person -- the electrification adviser -- to take the responsibility for the job of educating members to get the most use of the electricity they buy.

### *What Adviser Can Do*

Use electric power to increase farm income and improve the prosperity of surrounding territory and nearby towns. Electricity can influence the life and standards of living of rural people.

When plenty of power is available, encourage

age members to go all-electric. Electrification adviser can explain cost of various appliances and equipment in dollars and cents, showing advantages of using electricity.

Adviser can show farmers that by redesigning farm methods they can save labor, and level off peaks by building up load on off-peak hours. Valuable types of off-peak load include hay and grain driers, welders, water heaters, water pumping for stock, henhouse lighting, store advertising, etc.

Adviser can teach cooperation. Once members understand co-op principles, it is easier to meet competition of other types of fuel, and to see that failure of all to cooperate might jeopardize their investment in the co-op. Use every means to explain member ownership, and build up members' confidence in their own business.

In power-short areas use load limiters to save power. Where series of motors are used, ask consumer to let motors come on one at a time rather than all at once.

### *Who Can Be an Adviser?*

Some one trained in meeting the public will probably be your best choice. Vocational agri-



culture teachers, home economists, wiring inspectors -- these offer possibilities.

#### *How to Pay for a Program*

An education program can be paid for from operating funds. REA makes provision for education work if co-op asks for it in application for loan, and sets up a budget for a specific program. Some co-ops with no lines energized are already using educational advisers.

### GROUP 5

#### "HOW TO OFFSET OPPOSITION PROPAGANDA"

Delegate reporting: Claude L. Langley, Manager, New Mac Electric Cooperative, Neosho, Missouri

#### *Utility Opposition Persistent*

Utilities use radio and press to repeat over and over that they are "business managed" and to imply that co-ops are inefficient, badly managed. Utilities imply that co-ops are not tax-paying and are Government controlled. Utilities say they are the pioneers in the rural field.

#### *Co-ops Can Tell a Better Story*

Combat opposition propaganda with "member-owned, member-controlled" information. Use

#### *How to Train Adviser*

The co-op manager, wiring inspector, local specialists in various phases of power use and cooperation can help train the newly-employed adviser. REA also can help in such training.

#### *Enlist Others*

Train linemen and co-op personnel to educate members on making the most efficient use of power.

every device -- newsletters, State papers, articles in local papers, and local radio -- to tell your story that co-ops are repaying their loans with interest, that they are tax-paying, locally-owned businesses. Cite to business leaders the repayment record of REA-financed co-ops. Always keep before your members and your community that your co-op is democracy at work. Tell about area coverage. Tell how co-ops have extended their lines in recent years and how balanced use of power has benefitted members and community. Co-ops are not subsidized any more than are banks and railroads, which also have borrowed from the Government.



### *Train Employees to Tell Co-op Story*

Train every person officially connected with the co-op -- from the board of directors and manager, through the office employees, out to the maintenance men -- why the co-op was formed and what it does for members and the community.

### *Enlist Other Groups' Support*

Work with women's clubs, youth groups and civic organizations on information to combat opposition. Advertise at State and local fairs. Tell about area coverage -- service to thin areas. Remember importance of repetition.





RURAL ELECTRIFICATION ADMINISTRATION • U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE